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FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

COMPLETE WORKS
FOR THE
PIANOFORTE
BOOK TEN

RONDOS

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With a Prefatory Note by
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THREE RONDOS

IT is related that once Robert Schumann wearily shook his head when his early work was mentioned. "Dreary stuff!" said the composer, whose critical sense did not fail him even in so personal a question. What Chopin thought of his youthful music may be discovered in his correspondence. To suppose that the young Chopin sprang into the musical arena a fully equipped warrior is one of those romantic notions which gain currency among people unfamiliar with artistic evolution. His musical ancestry is easily traced; from opus 1 to opus 22 virtuosity for its own sheer sake is evident. Liszt has said that every young artist suffers from virtuoso fever, and Chopin did not altogether escape the fever of the footlights. He began composing at a time when piano music was well-nigh strangled by excess of ornament, and acrobats of the keyboard were kings; and when the Bach fugues and Beethoven sonatas lay dusty and neglected in the memory of the many. Little wonder, then, that we find this Polish virtuoso not timidly treading in the path of popular approval, but bravely carrying his banner —spangled, glittering, fanciful—and outstripping at their own game the *virtuosi* of Europe. His originality in this bejewelled work caused Hummel to admire, Kalkbrenner to wonder and Thalberg to detract. (This latter pianist made sport, in the company of Mendelssohn and Hiller, of Chopin's narrow range of dynamics. He once started to shouting after a concert of the Pole's and explained that, as he had felt stifled all the evening, he wanted to hear a real *forte*.) The supple fingers of the young man from Warsaw made quick work of existing technical difficulties. He needs must invent some of his own, and when Schumann saw the pages of opus 2 he uttered his now historical cry. To-day we wonder somewhat at his enthusiasm. It is the old story—a generation seeks to know, a second generation comprehends and enjoys, and the generation following discards.

Opus 1, a Rondo in C minor, dedicated to Madame de Linde (the wife of his father's friend, the rector Dr. Linde, and a lady with whom Frédéric often played duets), saw the light in 1825, though preceded by two Polonaises, a set of Variations, and two Mazurkas in G and B flat major. Schumann declared that Chopin's first published work was actually his tenth; and between opus 1 and opus 2 lay two years and twenty compositions. Be this as it may, one cannot help liking the C minor Rondo. In the A flat section is a premonition of his F minor Concerto. There is a light hand, and a joy in creation, which contrast with the heavy, dour quality of the C minor Sonata, opus 4. In a formal sense it is loosely constructed and possibly too exuberant for its close confines, yet this opus 1 is almost as remarkable as the Abegg Variations, the first work of Schumann. The *Rondeau à la Mazur* in F, opus 5, was published in 1827 (?) and Schumann reviewed it in 1836. It is sprightly, Polish in feeling and rhythmic life, and a glance at its pages gives us the familiar Chopin impression—florid passage-work, chromatic progressions, chords in extensions. Of this work Dr. Niecks says: "Schumann . . . thought it perhaps had been written in the eighteenth year of the composer, but he found in it, some confused passages excepted, no indication of the author's youth . . . the individuality and with it his nationality begin to reveal themselves unmistakably. Who could fail to recognize him in the peculiar sweet and persuasive flow of sound, and the serpent-like winding of the melodic outline, the widespread chords, the dissolving of the harmonies and the linking of their constituent parts . . . The harmonies are often novel, the matter is more homogeneous and better welded into oneness."

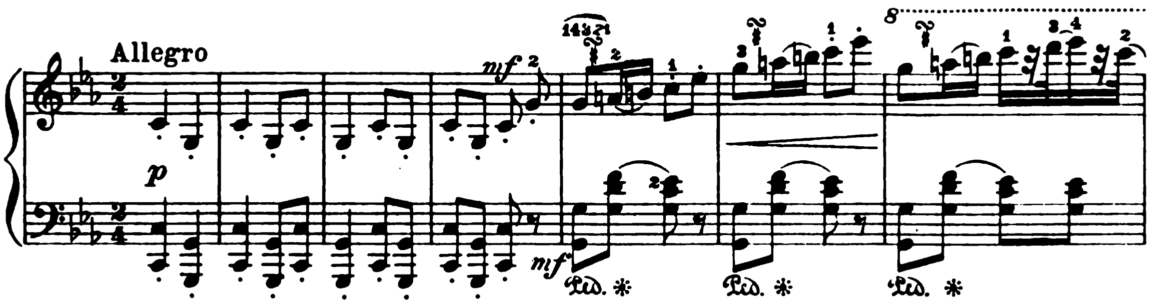
The E flat Rondo, opus 16, is in great favor at Conservatories, and is neat, rather than poetical, though the introduction has dramatic touches. It is to this brilliant piece, with its Weberish affinities, that Richard Burmeister has given an orchestral accompaniment. Niecks frankly ranks the piece low among the master's, as it is "patchy, unequal and little poetical." The remaining Rondo, for two pianos, posthumously published, as opus 73 (composed in 1828), was originally intended (so Chopin writes in 1828) for one piano, therefore consideration of it does not fall into the present classification. The Chopin Rondos, while not the most significant of his works, nevertheless cannot be overlooked in any comprehensive estimate; besides, they are not without charm and effectiveness.

James Huneker

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Rondos

Op. 1

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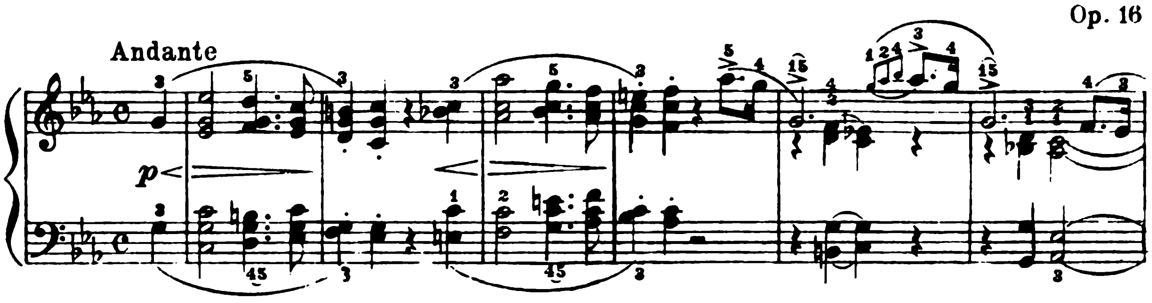
à la Mazurka

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